

VZCZCXR05735

PP RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #0996/01 0851646

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 261646Z MAR 07

FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7071

INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3839

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000996

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CR, S/CT, SCA/PAB, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE

NSC FOR AHARRIMAN

OSD FOR SHIVERS

CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-76, AND POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV EAID EAGR AF

SUBJECT: PRT/PANSHIR: FUTURE PLANS OF THE PROVINCE II

REF: A. KABUL 951

1B. KABUL 178

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Panjshir Province is changing. Its transformation will continue thanks to agents of change: a new road, radio broadcasts, cell phones, a maturing administration and an active PRT. Provincial officials have formulated specific plans to lay the foundation (ref A). Panjshir's future look and texture are only now emerging. Four positive visions have crystallized: Massoud Park, Kabul Suburb, Valley Cornucopia and Salang East. Panjshir will likely combine elements of all four, although Kabul Suburb may become dominant. All four are in sync with the PRT mission. A fifth vision, Fortress Panjshir, would become relevant if security deteriorated in the country. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) This is the second message in a two-part series on the future of Panjshir Province. This message examines general provincial visions. Ref A analyzed specific provincial plans.

¶3. (SBU) At a ribbon-cutting event for two of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)-funded bridges March 15, the acting Governor recalled the enormous progress of the past few years and predicted even greater changes in the future. The key document for projecting that change is the Provincial Development Plan (PDP). Currently, it is more a list of project priorities than a vision of provincial potential. Yet both, plans and visions, depend on the continuation of Panjshir's status as free of insurgent violence, poppy cultivation, drug trafficking and major corruption. Aggregating PDP projects and talking to influential Panjshiris, one can discern four visions of the future.

Vision One: Massoud Park

¶4. (SBU) At the heart of this vision lies a combination of natural beauty and national heritage. One Afghan contact compared it to that of Kyoto in Japan. It would appeal above

all to tourists. Panjshir would capitalize on its pristine nature, preserved through the topographical and historical isolation of the valley. It would offer various recreational options, including hiking, fishing and rafting. Panjshir, in this vision, would remain protected, possibly along the lines of an American national park. It would also preserve the Massoud legacy, especially his prominent tomb, former office complex, and hill-side gardens. Tourists, including many internationals, have already felt the pull of Massoud's tomb.

The Panjshiris who espouse this vision are a mixed lot drawn from the ranks of environmentalists, business people, elders and former mujaheddin. But, without quick concerted action, they could see some development spoiling their Massoud Park.

Vision Two: Kabul Suburb

¶15. (SBU) The USAID-funded rehabilitation of the main road has transformed the valley, making this vision an emerging force.

As the Governor told A/S Boucher during his January 10 visit, the road is the linchpin: It connects Panjshir to Kabul, and Kabul to Panjshir (ref B). Travel time has fallen from five to two hours. It has enabled many workers from Panjshir to seek employment in the capital without abandoning their families. It has allowed Panjshiris serving in the Afghan government, such as the Vice President, National Directorate of Security (NDS) Chief, and Chief of the Army Staff to return home on weekends. Indeed, traffic picks up three-fold on the weekends. Panjshiris cite the road as the most potent agent of change because of the proximity of Kabul. One effect has been economic, reflected in a price convergence between goods in Kabul and Panjshir, thanks to

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the reduction in transport costs. This vision is playing out, but could be derailed by insecurity in the Shomali Plain lying between the province and the capital.

Vision Three: Valley Cornucopia

¶16. (SBU) Panjshir possesses natural resources, the exploitation of which forms the core of this vision. The river, for example, is clean and flows year round. Panjshiris are considering ways to bottle it as drinking water and to channel it for irrigation and hydro power. The fruit and nut trees in the valley are world class, especially apple, apricot, almond and walnut. Now that transport costs have dropped, this produce is expanding its market-share in Kabul. For this reason, the Governor calls agriculture one of his top priorities. By far the most profitable resource is emerald extraction. According to the Deputy Governor, emerald exports reached a high-water mark in the early 1990s, then fell sharply. Peak employment was over eight hundred workers. Slowly the mines, located in two side valleys in the Khenj district, are coming back. There is not, however, any significant outside investment so far. This vision hinges on such investment. It faces limits because of electricity constraints on large-scale enterprises.

Vision Four: Salang East

¶17. (SBU) The nearby Salang Corridor furnishes the prototype for this vision of a vital commercial link between Kabul and the North. Along Salang's well-maintained road, a derivative economy has sprung up with motels, restaurants and gas stations. For Panjshir, such a concept would depend on extension of the USAID road further northeast through the Anjuman Pass. Ultimately, under this vision, the road would link Afghanistan to China in a modern version of the Silk Road. The distance from Kabul to Badakhshan would fall by half. Panjshir would benefit from the commercial traffic,

including that siphoned off from Salang. Of all the four visions, this one would take the longest time and require the greatest investment to realize. Such a road is part of the master plan of the Ministry of Public Works but is currently unfunded.

Fortress Panjshir

¶8. (SBU) A fifth vision is in fact a throwback. It depends on a bleak scenario, namely, the deterioration of security in the rest of the country. Panjshiris might then roll back the opening of the valley. Their province would revert to its previous state as a fortress, closed to the rest of the country and largely self-sufficient. This instinct is rooted in historical experience and reinforced by the recent fighting against the Soviets and Taliban. It explains Panjshir reluctance to turn in ammunition stocks under the UNDP/ANBP program and Panjshir skepticism of converting grain fields into specialized agriculture. Fortress Panjshir is incompatible with the other visions and contradictory to the PRT mission.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) The Panjshir Provincial Development Plan is all trees and no forest. It is filled with specific priorities but no general visions. Yet its individual projects could lead to aggregate outcomes, to four distinctly different visions. All four are in sync with the PRT mission to extend governance, bolster security and advance reconstruction. But not all of the visions are compatible with one another. The

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pastoral vision of Massoud Park, for example, could clash with the commercial vision of Salang East or that of valley cornucopia. Based on current trends, Kabul Suburb, which may very well be a blend of the other three, displays the strongest momentum. Fortress Panjshir, with its emphasis on closing and not opening the valley, may seem the antithetical vision; but Panjshiris have lived it and have never discarded it. END COMMENT.

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